

**Remarks by Jennifer Beck, Chair of the Economic Development Team, at the Opening of the Wilton Riverwalk Stony Brook Trail on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

Good morning, I'm Jennifer Beck, and was the project manager on this next phase of the Wilton Riverwalk. It's my pleasure, and I hope yours -- to be here at the official public opening of the Stony Brook Trail. This project is a joint venture between your conservation commission and your economic development team -- two organizations I have had the honor to be a part of since retiring 6 years ago. I've only lived in town 30 years, which makes me a relative newcomer compared to many, but I've always been drawn to these rivers and it's thrilling to finally see us celebrating them.

The project completes phase 3 of the Wilton Riverwalk -- thanks to a permanent easement granted by TDS and funding from AARP through a Community Challenge grant -- a very competitive national grant program. Wilton was one of only 2 towns in the state to win the award last year.

When we opened the walkway across the river behind me, the great blue heron did a fly-over during Kermit's opening speech. We took that to be a good sign of her approval. Well she did it again a few weeks ago when we were out here raking gravel. We watched her glide just above the river's surface from the dam all the way up river until she disappeared. Then about a half hour later she came back and circled overhead for at least 10 minutes riding the thermals. Probably hoping we were scaring up some frogs. But she's become a good omen for the riverwalk project. A sign that maybe we're doing the right thing.

This route along our river used to be a walking path many decades ago, but had become inaccessible. This project opened up the entire pathway along the banks of Stony Brook and created overlook areas that give the best views of the river and create terrific wildlife observation areas. I was out here watering this week and saw the otter, what I'm sure was a northern water snake and a flock of butterflies were drinking from the spray on the new grass. We ask that you stay on the trail pathway, off that new grass and away from the bank. We'll be monitoring usage to determine what additional enhancements and public safety measures we need to put in place. But today, you are welcome to enjoy the best river views in town.